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Historic Flag of the Confederacy Returned to Tennessee by Illinois

RETURN OF CONFEDERATE FLAG TO REMNANT OF THE EIGHTEENTH TENNESSEE REGIMENT—IS RESTORED TO GALLANT EIGHTEENTH TENNESSEE REGIMENT AFTER A LAPSE OF FIFTY-THREE YEARS BY STATE OF ILLINOIS.

The program as planned for the Confederate Memorial Day exercises at the Confederate circle in Evergreen Cemetery, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, was beautifully carried out on Thursday afternoon, June 3. The weather was ideal and all things conspired to make it an occasion of moment and interest to the gallant old boys who wore the gray in the stirring times of the sixties.

The crowning feature of the occasion was the return of the crumbling and battle-scarred flag of the Eighteenth Tennessee Regiment by the State of Illinois. This flag, famous in song and story, and sacred to the Confederacy of this vicinity especially, it will be recalled, was surrendered at Fort Donelson in February, 1862. The return of this flag is largely due to the interest of Colonel L. M. Armstrong, a native Tennessean, though for many years a prominent practitioner at the bar in Peoria, Illinois. At the presentation the State of Illinois was represented by Colonel Armstrong of Peoria, and by Major David T. Brown, representing the Grand Army of the Republic of the same city. The local committee was composed of Captain B. L. Ridley, chairman, W. A. Hoskins and Joe P. Smith. The last two named were members of the Eighteenth Tennessee.

Colonel Armstrong made the presentation speech.

Major Brown spoke on behalf of the Grand Army of the Republic, and stated that this was one of the happiest moments of his life and that he was proud of the spirit that could lay aside the animosity and bitterness of the past and use such an occasion to celebrate a reunited nation. He paid a beautiful tribute to the men who had opposed him in many battles.

Major J. S. Barton of McMinnville, the highest surviving officer of the Eighteenth Tennessee, accepted the flag on behalf of the members of his old regiment and of the State of Tennessee. He took occasion to answer the criticism of some who deemed that General Buckner had acted hastily in surrendering at Fort Donelson, where the battle-flag had been surrendered.

Miss Fay Poole recited "Let the Conquered Banner Wave," and "The Southern Flag," was recited by Mrs. Frederick Smith, the two numbers being especially appropriate, they were enthusiastically applauded.

An incident of interest connected with this battle-scarred flag so gallantly returned by the State of Illinois, is that subsequent to its surrender at Fort Donelson another flag was presented to the regiment, and during the fight at Murfreesboro, Logan Nelson seized the flag, after four flag-bearers had been shot down, and carried it successfully till the close of the battle. This flag was given to a sister of Joseph Binford, deceased, who in turn presented it to Mr. Nelson, who died only a short time ago and who had been county register of the county for several years. The flag is now in the possession of his sons, Messrs. J. M. and Ross Nelson of Murfreesboro, and was displayed during the exercises.

Another flag, which is now in the possession of a daughter of Colonel Reuben Butler, who was once colonel of the regiment, was also exhibited at the ceremonies, it being now in the possession of Mr. James C. Snell of Nashville. A full history of this flag follows:

This flag is the battle-flag of the Confederacy, in the shape of St. Andrew's cross, with stars and bars, and bearing the

inscription, "Eighteenth Tennessee," and was the battle-flag given to the regiment by the Confederate government.

The earliest history of this flag is that it must have been acquired by the regiment at Dalton, Georgia, the regiment then being commanded by Colonel Butler. This flag was in every battle in which the regiment was engaged, including Resaca, Rocky Face, New Hope Church, Atlanta, Jonesboro, Swamp Creek, in Georgia; then back into Tennessee, in a small engagement near Murfreesboro, at Mrs. Gresham's and then to Bentonville, North Carolina, where it was furled at the surrender of Johnston's army.

For some time prior to the surrender, Colonel Butler commanded the regiment, and at Greensboro, North Carolina, gave the order to "stack arms," when what silver money that was on hand was divided among the soldiers, each man drawing \$1.25.

This flag has remained in the possession of Colonel Butler's family ever since the close of the war, and is now preserved by his daughter, Mrs. Dora Snell, wife of James C. Snell, of Nashville, Tennessee.

An enjoyable feature of the exercises was the singing of a number of old songs by Captains B. L. Ridley, Richard Beard and others. These gray-haired veterans were cheered to the echo every time an opportunity offered itself. Captain Ridley, as master of ceremonies, was ably aided by Captain Beard, A. M. Overall, W. A. Hoskins, A. J. Patterson, Evander Lytle and others, who used every energy to make the occasion a success.

A moving picture representative was on hand and secured a film which portrays the event from beginning to end.

FLAG PRESENTED TO STATE.

This sacred emblem, so generously returned to the remnant of the Eighteenth Tennessee, in accord with the directions of the State of Illinois, was formally returned to the care and trust of the State of Tennessee at the Capitol Building in Nashville, June 5, at noon before a large audience.

The ceremonies were simple but impressive. The flag was presented to Governor Rye by Colonel Armstrong in the name of the State of Illinois, and by Mr. A. M. Overall, of this city, as representative of the survivors of the Eighteenth Tennessee Regiment.

In addition to the flag the roster of the field staff of the Confederate Regiment was also returned, as were also particles of the flag which had crumbled during the fifty years of reposing in the Capitol of Illinois. These particles had been placed in an envelope by Mr. Armstrong, who called them "sacred dust."

"Your excellency," said Mr. Armstrong, "I bring you greetings from the State of Illinois. In behalf of my State I have the profound pleasure of presenting this flag to you. Around it the flower of manhood of the North and South fell to rise no more. May it rest here forever as an emblem of peace, harmony and mutual love between the States of Illinois and Tennessee."

Mr. Overall, in behalf of his surviving comrades of the Eighteenth Tennessee, said: "Your excellency, I present to you this sad but sacred relic of departed days to be deposited by you for safe-keeping."

In accepting the flag for the State, Governor Rye said:

"I desire first to express my pleasure and appreciation for the kindly greeting to us from Illinois. While we as citizens of the Volunteer State stand ready to defend the stars and stripes, I am glad you do not begrudge us the sacred privilege of paying our devotion to this flag. It is the very soul of a sacred sentiment.

"The hand that took it from us was the hand of war; the hand that brings it back is the hand of brotherly love. In the name of the State of Tennessee I want to thank the State of Illinois for giving it back to us. It is stained with blood and pierced with bullets and under its folds fell the chivalry of the grandest army that ever took the field."

ADDRESS OF L. M. ARMSTRONG ON PRESENTATION OF CONFEDERATE
FLAG OF THE EIGHTEENTH TENNESSEE REGIMENT—
RETURNED BY ILLINOIS TO REGIMENT AT MUR-
FREESBORO, TENNESSEE, JUNE 3, 1915.

Mr. Chairman, Men of the Eighteenth Tennessee, Ladies, Friends and Fellow Citizens of the South:

The pleasure of this occasion is exceeded only by its honor and its memories. I am happy to be back again on my native heath, the land of my kindred and friends of early days, the land of song and story, of statesmen and soldiers. I love the rills, the vales and hills of Tennessee, its rocks, its trees, its flowers, its bright men and fair women. How natural it is for a man to keep next to his heart recollections of the place of his birth!

This thought reminds me of a remark I once heard from a man from the Emerald Isle who was much given to talk of his native country and its people. One day I said to him, "Pat, why don't you quit this blarney of yours about Old Ireland and be a full-fledged American?"

"Why, sir," he replied, "do you expect a man to forget his mother?"

I have come to you on a mission of peace and good-will, bringing, as it were, a song of love from the Harp of the North to the Heart of the South; a message and a material remembrance from the people of the great State of Illinois through their duly chosen representatives at Springfield.

While the clang of war is being heard throughout the larger part of the earth, we, my fellow countrymen, are enjoying undisturbed the blessings of a united and brave, but peace-loving, people.

The message that I bring to you today takes us back on memory's flight more than a half-century. Fifty-four years ago there stood near this hallowed spot a maiden flushed with the glow of southern pride, and buoyed with hope for a cause then new, but to her as righteous as the very light of Heaven. Standing in the presence of a small army of as gallant men as

ever drew a sword—not Roman, not Grecian, not Europe's proudest comparable to them—simple, sturdy Americans, she unfolded to the southern breeze this flag; then an ensign of war, now a memento of peace.

How plainly that memorable occasion comes back to the minds of you men of the Eighteenth, who struggled under these colors! Here was the full regiment of yourselves and comrades, men from the very flower of Tennessee, who were destined to be ranked among the bravest soldiers of the young Confederacy. Would that I might recall the words of Miss Matty Ready, afterwards Mrs. John H. Morgan, who made the presentation address! Not that they might awaken the sentiments of antagonism you then felt, but for the reminiscences they might bring, and for their historical value. How little did she dream that I, then a child, would more than half a hundred years later return this flag here from its captivity. Could she by any flight of imagination or prophetic ken, have contemplated such a scene? No, no; for to her mind and the minds of those around her on such an occasion as this that was as improbable as the very confusion of the stars.

The ceremonies that day were appropriate to the occasion. The late Joseph B. Palmer, then colonel, was the recipient of the flag for the regiment, responding to the address of presentation.

There is a tradition that the flag was made in whole or in part from a dress or dresses of Miss Ready. I am told that a number of ladies of Murfreesboro participated in the making of the flag, and it is to be hoped that some of them, spared by time, are here today. Such acts are never complete without the hand of women. No doubt many fair faces that I am looking upon now are those of descendants of those noble women.

You remember, gentlemen, that shortly after the day of presentation your regiment left for the scene of action at the front. Through many a shower of shot and shell this ensign passed until its capture at Fort Donelson by Illinois troops February 15, 1862. You were taken to prison at Camp Butler, Illinois, but the flag wended its way until it reached the Cap-

itol in Springfield. There it has since remained in the possession of the State of Illinois.

More than two years ago, while looking through the Hall of Relics at Springfield, I discovered this flag in the centre of a group of Confederate flags, in a large glass-covered incase-ment. Pinned on it was this card which reads: "Confederate flag, of the Eighteenth Tennessee Infantry. This flag was captured by Company E, Sixty-sixth Regiment, Illinois, at the battle of Fort Donelson, February 15, 1862. The Eighteenth Tennessee was one of the regiments engaged in the desperate charge on the right wing of the Union army. The ladies of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, presented this flag to the Eighteenth Tennessee. The presentation was made by Mrs. Gen. John Morgan."

With it also was the roster comprising the field and staff of the regiment.

On speaking to the custodian regarding the flag, I was told that it was once ordered returned to the regiment from which it was taken, but for some unexplained reason the order was never carried out. This I bore in mind, and when on a visit to your city in the spring of last year, I related the incident to Captain B. L. Ridley and other members of the regiment. They in turn took the matter up, and requested me to act for them in an endeavor to get the flag restored to them and their comrades, it being of especial interest and of historical value to them and to the State. As early as I could after returning to Peoria, I visited Springfield and on investigating through the offices of the adjutant-general and secretary of state, I learned that there was a statute then in vogue which had rescinded any previous order or resolution that might have been made regarding the flag, and that it could only be removed from the Hall of Relics through an act of the Legislature. Shortly after the General Assembly convened last January, I was furnished with a petition signed in duplicate by representative members of the Eighteenth Regiment and a number of leading citizens of Murfreesboro and vicinity, asking for the release and return of the flag, and suggesting me as a suitable person to receive said flag and convey same to its original holders.

Through the kindly offices of State Senator John Dailey and Representative Thomas N. Gorman of Peoria, the petition was presented to each House of the General Assembly of the State of Illinois, but owing to a deadlock in the House of Representatives, which lasted over six weeks, we were greatly hampered in getting our measure advanced. Senator Dailey who has taken a deep interest in the matter, and is in tune with the conciliatory sentiment you have expressed, offered a bill in the Senate.

The bill was passed without a dissenting vote. Many members of the Grand Army of the Republic, hearing of the measure, had already expressed themselves as being in favor of it. The Bryner Post at Peoria favored it, and Bishop Samuel Fallows, a distinguished old federal soldier, and commander of the Illinois State Grand Army of the Republic, expressed himself as heartily in favor of the release and return of the flag, afterwards sending a telegram to that effect to the post at Peoria.

On the bill reaching the House, Mr. Gorman took a most earnest and active part in urging it through so that we might get the flag in time to have it here today. The bill passed the House by a vote of 113 in favor, and only three against it.

Gentlemen of the Eighteenth, fellow citizens of the South, this magnanimous act of the State of Illinois, I can assure you, is one of great sincerity. The people of that State wish to be in harmony and unity with you. I feel confident of your appreciation of their act, and of your kindly and brotherly feeling for those people of your sister commonwealth. May I not safely express the same sentiments for the whole State of Tennessee? May not the proceedings here today serve as a fitting climax to the conciliatory movement which has been so general, and I may say, complete, throughout the land?

Well do I remember when along in the seventies, the keynote to this was sounded by that gifted southern writer, L. Virginia French, in her poem, "Palmetto and Pine," the sentiment being taken up by such men as General B. J. Hill of this State, Colonel E. W. Munford who was on the staff of Albert Sidney Johnson, and caught that great general in his arms as

he fell from his horse, mortally wounded, at the Battle of Shiloh, of Dr. J. B. Cowan, chief surgeon of Forrest's staff, and if I remember correctly, of Colonel Henry Watterson of Louisville Courier-Journal, and other leading southerners. I, though young and obscure, did what I could in my humble way to advance the movement.

My friends, I trust and pray that the sound of war has passed out forever from this people. In its stead I would raise the voice of Peace and Harmony. Our country has always stood out among the nations of the earth as an advocate of peace, but our people do not hesitate at war if it is necessary, and would unite at once to the colors against any foreign foe. It is natural that in a land so broad as ours the people in different sections should differ somewhat in their customs and characteristics and ways of thinking but how glorious is the realization to us that we are today a people in perfect unison under those colors that stand for the equal and full protection of each of us, and that we are presided over by a great and good president, who is of and for the people. We are living in a new era, one of advancement, in which fight, men and women everywhere over the land, are striving to up-build and sustain grand and lasting institutions. This country is too progressive, too optimistic, too busy, to spend time over thoughts of revenge and hatred.

My friends, we may not forget the past. Let us give reverence and tears to the memory of those brave men of the sixties. We can but think with admiration of those great armies that clashed with hottest fire in the great struggle. No grander armies ever met in conflict. They were Americans.

Fifty years ago the campfires of the Eighteenth Tennessee went out for the last time. Few souls are left that slept by those fires. Their sons and grandsons are today among the truest of our citizens, patriotic to the Stars and Stripes, although they hold in sacred memory the Stars and Bars their fathers strove under in the sixties, which is but natural. Should the tocsin of war be sounded for this country, no men of the land would, I believe, fly quicker to arms than the young men of the South. During our late war with Spain many of

the brightest and most chivalrous men of this State sprang to the support of the nation. I now recall one young man in particular who served as a brave officer in the Philippines, and who was a son of one of the most prominent generals of the Southern Confederacy. Who did more valiant service for the United States in that war than the late General Joseph Wheeler, an ex-Confederate of much note?

Men of the Eighteenth, I now come to the formal delivery of this flag, bringing the sacred colors back to you, after a long separation of over fifty-three years. Let us spare reference to the tragic scenes that have attended it since it was first presented to you upon this now historic ground. Take it again to your manly hearts. If you weep over it, the people of this great united nation will weep with you. If you rejoice over its return, the people will rejoice with you. You are just as welcome to it now as you were on that first memorable occasion in '61. Though it was then a beacon light to lead you on to conflict, may it now and henceforth serve as an emblem of peace and fraternity!

The act of the Illinois Legislature provides that this flag shall be presented to you by myself and Mr. David S. Brown, a member of the Grand Army of the Republic, you in turn to deliver it to the State of Tennessee.

Now in the name of the great State of Illinois and its good and generous people, we return to you this flag.